



**West Nile Virus Vaccine for Horses  
California Department of Food and Agriculture  
2003 Recommendations**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) licensed a West Nile Virus (WNV) vaccine manufactured by Fort Dodge Laboratories in February 2003. This product was previously marketed under a conditional license and was found to be safe and effective as an aide in the prevention of WNV in horses.

The manufacturer recommends two doses, three weeks apart, plus annual revaccinations. Effectiveness has been demonstrated three weeks after the administration of the second of the two doses. Therefore, the initial two dosages should be administered at least three weeks prior to mosquito season. There is also now evidence that 6-month booster vaccinations are likely to enhance protection. It does appear that one dose does not provide protective immunity because several horses in endemic areas became infected with WNV despite receiving a single dose of the vaccine.

Decisions by horse owners and their veterinary practitioner to vaccinate for WNV should be based on the risk of horses being exposed to mosquitoes. Effective prevention measures include eliminating, or drastically minimizing the mosquito exposure to horses by elimination of mosquitoes and their breeding grounds in standing stagnant water. Approved mosquito repellants should be applied if exposure is unavoidable.

Accurate vaccination records should be maintained because it is important to distinguish between vaccinated and exposed or infected horses. In addition, international shipments of horses with WNV titers may be restricted. Practitioners are urged to follow diagnostic procedures provided in the guidelines attached to the spring CDFA/CDHS annual encephalitis newsletter when caring for horses showing signs of WNV that may be caused by WNV.